

# Exploiting Satellite Broadcast despite HTTPS

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**Abstract**—HTTPS enhances end-user privacy and is often preferred or enforced by over-the-top content providers, but renders inoperable all intermediate network functions operating above the transport layer, including caching, content/protocol optimization, and security filtering tools. These functions are crucial for the optimization of integrated satellite-terrestrial networks. Additionally, due to the use of end-to-end and per-session encryption keys, the advantages of a satellite’s wide-area broadcasting capabilities are limited or even negated completely. This paper investigates two solutions for authorized TLS interception that involve TLS splitting. We present how these solutions can be incorporated into integrated satellite-terrestrial networks and we discuss their trade-offs in terms of deployment, performance, and privacy. Furthermore, we design a solution that leverages satellite broadcast transmission even in the presence of TLS (i.e. with the use of HTTPS) by exploiting application layer encryption in the path between the satellite terminal and the TLS server. Our findings indicate that even if no other operation than TLS splitting is performed, TLS handshake time, which involves roundtrips through possibly a Geosynchronous satellite, can be reduced by up to 94%. Moreover, by combining an application layer encryption solution with TLS splitting, broadcast transmissions can be exploited as well as proactive caching, content pushing, request aggregation, and other optimizations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is evident that the Web is becoming encrypted. Initiatives such as *Let’s Encrypt* allow hassle free and no-cost HTTPS services. Therefore, it comes to no surprise that according to Google, Chrome users spend two-thirds of their time in HTTPS pages [1]. Similarly, HTTPS pages receive higher ranking by search engines and browsers already mark plain HTTP pages as non-secure. At the same time, privacy concerns have led to the use of TLS even for transferring DRM protected content (e.g., the case of Netflix [2]). Although HTTPS improves significantly end-user security and privacy, it comes with a cost: it prevents in-network functions, such as network-based security services, application-level gateways and fine-level differentiation of services, session controllers, transcoders, proxies, and caches.

In-network content manipulation is not uncommon in wireless and mobile networks and it is mainly used for optimizing network performance (as perceived by both the network operators and the end-users). Naylor et al. [3] reported that a transparent proxy used by a major European mobile carrier, serving more than 20 million subscribers, contributes to a

2TB/day decrease of upstream traffic using caching and 28.5% decrease of last-mile downstream traffic using compression. Woo et al. [4] reported that standard Web caching can reduce download bandwidth consumption up to 27.1%. Sivakumar et al. [5] developed a proxy-code named PARCEL—for mobile networks that pre-fetches and pre-processes Web content: browsing 34 Web pages from the top 500 Alexa global pages using PARCEL resulted in a 49.6% reduction in page load time and 65% reduction in energy consumption. Similarly, various publications (e.g., [6], [7]) report that the number of middleboxes that manipulate network traffic in big enterprise networks is almost equal to the number of L2 switches and L3 routers. All these functions can be used for improving the performance of integrated satellite-terrestrial networks, as well as for decreasing the latency introduced by the satellite part of those networks. However, the use of TLS/HTTPS affects all of them. Additionally, end-to-end encryption, as well as the use of per-session encryption keys (all imposed by TLS) render broadcast communication useless, since a content encrypted for a specific session is just “junk” for all other sessions. This has a huge impact to satellite-terrestrial communications, where broadcast is widely used for delivering content.

End-to-end encryption has been a problem for Content Distribution Networks (CDNs) for a long time now. For this reason CDN providers are using solutions, such as *Custom Certificates* and *Certificate sharing* [8] that allow them to intercept TLS connections. However, these solutions require a long-term trust relationship between the content owner and the CDN provider. Furthermore, these solutions assume that CDN providers are trusted to stop intercepting TLS traffic whenever requested by content owners. These requirements can be hardly satisfied when it comes to TLS interception in an integrated satellite-terrestrial network since satellite terminals (i.e., the location where TLS split should take place) are not so well protected (compared to a CDN node), and their operators cannot always be trusted by content owners. Therefore, using these solutions in such an architecture would create intolerable security and privacy risks.

In this paper we leverage two solutions that allow authorized TLS splitting by in-network devices and we use them in the context of integrated satellite-terrestrial networks. These solutions, namely Keyless TLS [9] and DANE with delegation semantics [8], allow a content owner to temporarily authorize

a device to (lawfully) intercept a specific TLS session. In essence, these solutions *split* a TLS connection into two parts: one between the TLS client and the device and another between the device and the TLS server; we use these solutions in order to split a TLS connection at the satellite terminals. Additionally, we leverage the fact that due to this split in the TLS connection, the algorithms and protocols for securing the path between the satellite terminal and the TLS server are hidden from the TLS client; hence, we can apply application layer security solutions in that part: these solutions, if configured properly, do not impede satellite’s broadcasting capabilities. The contributions of our work presented in this paper are:

- We design an integrated satellite-terrestrial network architecture which incorporates TLS splitting mechanisms.
- We analyze the performance and security properties of our architecture through analysis and simulation.
- We design an extension to our architecture that uses application layer encryption in the path between the satellite terminal and the service provider, enabling solutions that take advantage of the broadcast capabilities of the satellite network.

The structure of the remainder of this paper is as follows. In Section 2 we present background information and we introduce the selected solutions. In Section 3 we present how the selected solutions can be used with integrated satellite-terrestrial networks and we evaluate our approach in Section 4. Finally, in Section 5 we provide our conclusions and plans for future work.

## II. BACKGROUND

### A. Transport Layer Security

The primary goal of the Transport Layer Security (TLS) protocol is to provide privacy and data integrity between two communicating endpoints; a client and a server [10]. TLS enables the establishment of a secure connection that protects the confidentiality and the integrity of the transmitted data. TLS is composed of two protocols: the Handshake Protocol and the Record Protocol. The Handshake Protocol allows a client and a server to authenticate each other and to negotiate security algorithms, as well as the corresponding cryptographic keys. The TLS Record Protocol is then used for securing application layer data using the agreed keys and algorithms. The Handshake protocol is critical when it comes to TLS splitting; for this reason we provide some more details about it next.

A TLS Handshake is completed in 3 steps. The first step is the cipher suite negotiation. In this step the client and server exchange “Hello” messages and choose the cipher suite that will be used throughout a session. The second step is authentication. In TLS, a server proves its identity to the client and a client may also prove its identity to the server. Digital certificates (and their corresponding private keys) are the basis of this authentication whereas the exact method used for authentication is determined by the cipher suite negotiated. In any case, the authentication process involves the private key of

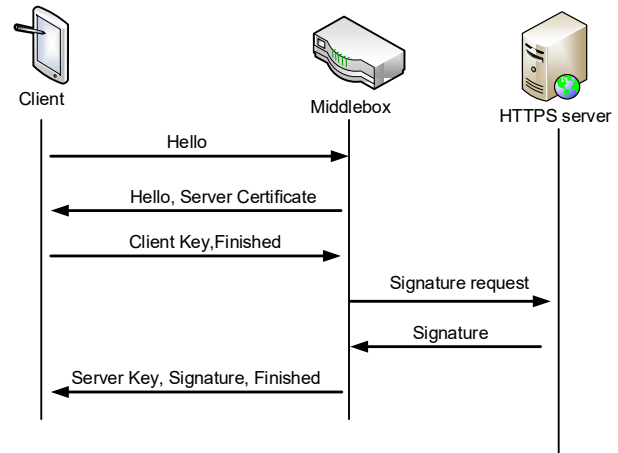


Fig. 1. Keyless TLS.

a public-private key pair, owned by the authenticating entity. The final step is key exchange where the client and server exchange random numbers which combined with additional data permit the secure calculation of the session-specific shared keys.

### B. Keyless TLS

Keyless TLS allows authorized devices to intervene in a secured connection, but without having access to any private key, hence they cannot be authenticated without the “help” of the TLS server. In particular, the intercepting device performs the TLS handshake and responds on behalf of the server, but all handshake operations requiring the private key (of the server) are relayed to the server over a dedicated secured channel: the server authenticates the intercepting device, performs the private key operations, and returns the result through the same secured channel. This process is illustrated in Figure 1. Cloudflare [11] and Akamai [12] are offering keyless TLS as a service.

Keyless TLS has two significant advantages: intercepting devices do not learn private keys and TLS servers participate in all session establishments, hence they can prevent at any time a device from intervening in an encrypted connection. Moreover, keyless TLS requires no modification to TLS clients. Of course, keyless TLS does not come without disadvantages. Its main drawback is the weakening of end-to-end security since, in reality, a TLS connection is split into two independent connections that involve two different TLS handshakes; one of them may result in a weak cipher which reduces the security of the end-to-end connection. According to a study [8] performed across many major CDN services that use similar techniques this phenomenon is common and there were even cases where the connection between the intercepting CDN node and the server was not secured at all: sensitive information was transferred using plain HTTP, yet clients were under the impression they were using an end-to-end encrypted connection.

### C. DANE with delegation semantics

DNS-Based Authentication of Named Entities (DANE) (originally proposed in RFC 6698 [13] and further refined in RFC 7671 [14]), allows binding a domain name to a certificate. This binding is implemented by including certificates in DNS records.<sup>1</sup> In particular, a special type of DNS record, referred to as TLSA DNS, is used for associating certificates with domain names, allowing DANE-enabled TLS clients to validate TLS server certificates. The resolution of TLSA records is secured using DNSSEC. DANE with delegation semantics [8] leverages DANE, allowing servers to add intermediate certificates to their TLSA records, which can be used by intercepting devices. This way a client may obtain a list of certificates that can be used for a particular TLS connection. Figure 2 illustrates an example of a TLS handshake interception supported by DANE. As it can be observed, the intercepting device responds to the client “Hello” message with its own certificate (as opposed to the Keyless TLS case, where the intercepting device responds with the certificate of the server). Subsequently, the client performs a TLSA record resolution and validates that the received certificate is “pinned” to the server’s domain name, therefore it is approved. Finally, the client proceeds with the subsequent TLS handshake messages.

With this solution, certificate revocation is completely controlled by the origin server and can be performed by simply altering the corresponding TLSA record. Furthermore, an interesting property of this solution is that a handshake can be completed without any involvement of the original TLS server. Deploying this solution requires DNSSEC along with modifications to the certificate validation process performed by TLS clients. Of course, this approach suffers from the DNSSEC inherent problems, for example, an attacker may replay a TLSA record response related to a certificate that is not valid any more. Overhead is also added due to the extra DNS round trip.

### III. TLS INTERCEPTION FOR INTEGRATED SATELLITE-TERRESTRIAL NETWORKS

In this section we describe our solution for supporting TLS interception in integrated satellite-terrestrial networks. We consider a typical integrated satellite-terrestrial network architecture where a satellite terminal and a satellite gateway are responsible for connecting client applications with server applications over a satellite network (see for example Figure 3). In the following we consider that clients and servers wish to communicate over TLS and we propose two approaches that allow terminals to perform TLS interception so as (i) to accelerate the TLS handshake—which under normal circumstances has to be performed over the satellite network, and (ii) to perform content transmission optimizations (e.g., content caching, aggregation of content requests, etc.).

Our two approaches are based on the TLS interception solutions presented in the previous sections. With both solutions,

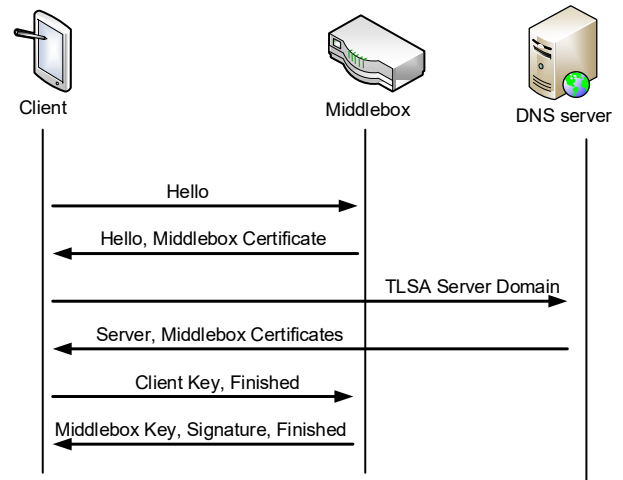


Fig. 2. DANE with delegation semantics.

whenever a terminal receives a client “Hello” TLS message (i.e., the first message of the TLS handshake) it should be able to tell (i) if it is allowed to intercept this TLS handshake, and (ii) which certificate to use. Both these problems can be solved using the Server Name Indication TLS extension [15]. With this extension a TLS client includes in its “Hello” message the domain name of the service with which it wants to interact. We consider that satellite terminals are pre-configured with the domain names of the services they are authorized to intercept, therefore they can examine the client “Hello” message and decide whether to intercept the handshake or to forward the message to the intended recipient.<sup>2</sup>

#### A. Integration with Keyless TLS

Keyless TLS is integrated in our architecture by implementing the Keyless TLS protocol at the terminals and the TLS servers; no modification is required to TLS clients (these components are depicted with a green box in Figure 3). Furthermore, a secure communication channel is established between the terminal and the server. This channel, which in our implementation is secured using TLS, can only be used by terminals authorized to intervene in a TLS handshake and its purpose is to protect the confidentiality of the Keyless TLS specific messages transmitted between the terminal and the server. In order to assure that only authorized terminals can access this channel TLS client authentication with certificates [11] is used i.e., for each authorized terminal, a TLS server generates a certificate, which is installed using out-of-band mechanisms and it is used by the terminal to authenticate itself to the server when setting up the channel. The channel setup takes place only once and the same channel is used for forwarding Keyless TLS specific messages for all subsequent handshakes intercepted by the same terminal. With all these components in place, a TLS client initiates the TLS handshake, which is intercepted by the terminal and whenever

<sup>2</sup>This extension is well supported by all browsers since it is used for connecting to a TLS server hosted in a shared (e.g., Cloud) environment.

<sup>1</sup>In particular digitally signed hashes of the certificates.

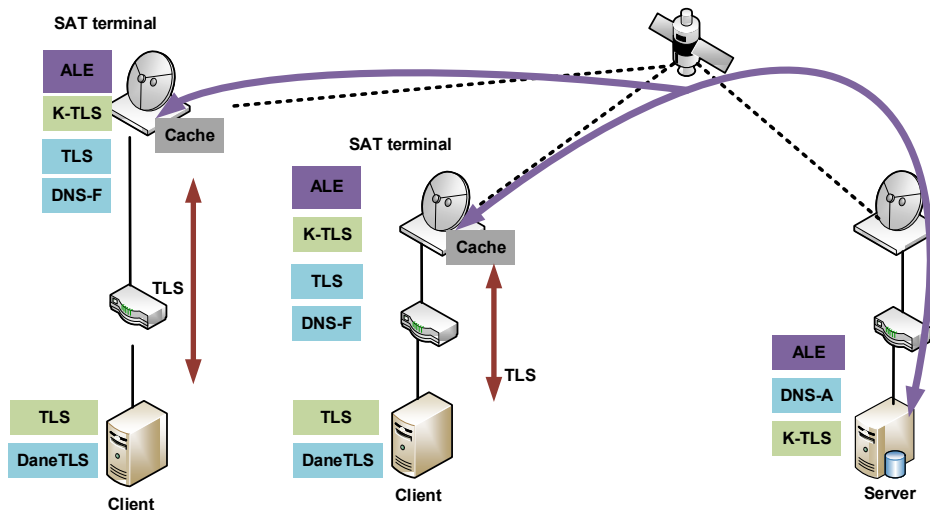


Fig. 3. TLS interception combined with application layer encryption.

the terminal requires to perform an operation using the private key of the server, it sends all necessary information to the server through the secure channel; then the server performs the necessary actions and responds back to the terminal, again through the secure channel.

An interesting property of Keyless TLS is that the server participates in all TLS handshakes. Although, this property enhances the security of the scheme (we discuss security properties in the following sections), it adds latency since the satellite network has to be used once per TLS handshake. In some cases, it is possible to compensate for this delay by “abusing” the SNI TLS extension: since the domain of the service in which the client is interested in is known, it may be possible to *push* content to a terminal together with the first Keyless TLS message. Then, when requested, this content can be served to a client directly by the terminal (which in this case acts as a transparent cache), hence the satellite link does not have to be used.

#### B. Integration with DANE with delegation semantics

For the integration of DANE with delegation semantics, clients implement TLS with DANE assisted certificate verification, i.e., they are able to verify the validity of a digital certificate by retrieving the corresponding TLSA DNS record (using DNSSEC). The components of this solution are depicted with a blue box in Figure 3. With this approach a secure communication channel between the terminal and the server is not required in order to complete the TLS handshake.

As already discussed, during the TLS handshake clients should perform a DNS resolution in order to validate the certificate of the terminal. In the general case, this resolution will cross the satellite network. However, this can be easily mitigated by installing DNS forwarders in satellite terminals and by configuring clients to use these forwarders as the default DNS server. The forwarders, which should implement the DNSSEC validation processes, can then cache the corresponding DNS replies. Furthermore, and since these replies

concern the terminal operation, the forwarders have incentives to periodically perform DNS requests to the authoritative DNS server (even if they are not instructed by a client) in order to keep their cache fresh and up to date.

#### C. Combination with application layer encryption

With both approaches the client ends up establishing a TLS connection with the satellite terminal (the difference lies in the fact that with Keyless TLS the client “thinks” that it is communicating to the server, whereas with DANE with delegation semantics the client knows that it communicates with the terminal, acting on behalf of the server). Clients are oblivious to the security mechanisms used for securing the communication between the terminal and the server. A typical approach would have been to use another TLS connection between these two entities; alternatively an application layer encryption mechanism can be used so that solutions that leverage a satellite’s wide area broadcasting capabilities will be able to function properly. The components of this approach are illustrated with purple colors in Figure 3.

Our application encryption approach assumes that servers and (authorized) terminals share a secret key. This key is used for periodically exchanging content encryption keys. The latter keys are used for encrypting transmitted content and are common for all terminals. This is a typical mechanism used for broadcasting protected content over satellites, e.g., as used by the Conditional Access system of the Digital Video Broadcasting (DVB) standard. However, the content encryption key is not related to the encryption key used in the TLS connection between the client and the terminal. For this reason the terminals have to decrypt the received items and re-encrypt them with the corresponding TLS key.

## IV. EVALUATION

### A. TLS Handshake speed improvements

Compared to “vanilla” TLS, the discussed TLS interception solutions require fewer message exchanges over the satellite

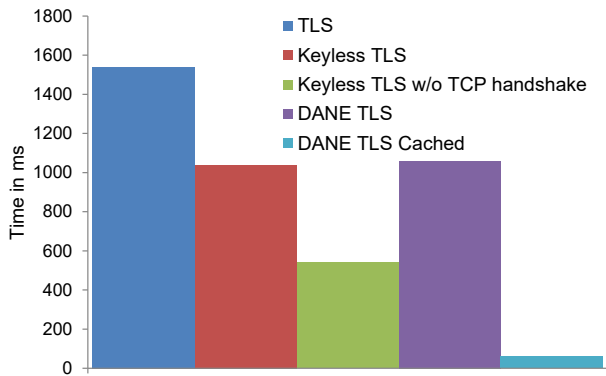


Fig. 4. Time required to complete a TLS handshake.

network. Therefore, even if the satellite terminals implement no additional content transmission optimization function, significant gains can be achieved. Figure 4 illustrates the time required to complete a TLS handshake in a network where a terminal and a gateway are connected through a Geosynchronous satellite. The roundtrip delay of the path between the terminal and the gateway has been calculated to be 500 ms using the OpenSAND satellite network emulator [16]. Furthermore, the roundtrip delay of a terrestrial path has been set to 20 ms. It can be observed that when a TLS interception solution is used, the TLS handshake is completed much faster. Especially, when DANE with delegation semantics is used combined with cached DNS records, the satellite network does not have to be used during a TLS handshake, hence the TLS handshake time is reduced by 94%.

### B. Content transmission optimizations

Here we discuss some content transmission optimizations that become possible if the application layer encryption approach is used.

The application layer encryption solution used in our system is Encrypted Content-Encoding for HTTP, specified in RFC 8188 [17]. This solution enables HTTP messages (request or response) to be encrypted using a symmetric encryption key distributed using out-of-band mechanisms. In the following we give an example that illustrates how the combination of application layer encryption with TLS interception can benefit integrated satellite-terrestrial networks. In this example we assume the architecture of Figure 3. In this architecture the terminals and the servers share a symmetric encryption key. Furthermore, the terminals include a cache and support TLS interception.

Suppose an end-user requests a piece of static content over TLS (e.g., a video file), its terminal intercepts the TLS session and forwards the request to the server. The server encrypts the requested content using the shared encryption key and transmits it over plain HTTP. The terminal re-encrypts the received content (to match the TLS encryption key) and transmits it back to the client. All other terminals can cache this piece of content (since it is being broadcast). Then, if another client, connected to (the same or) another terminal, requests

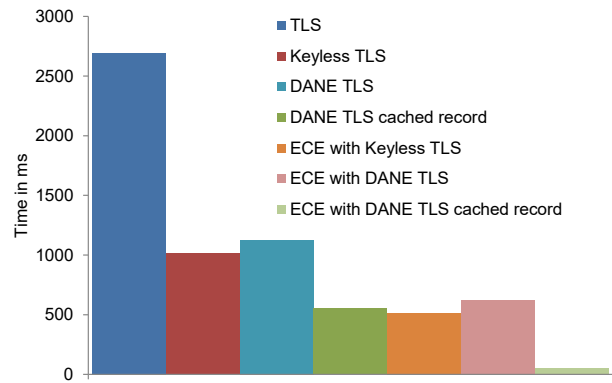


Fig. 5. Time to load a Web page using HTTPS.

the same piece of content (using TLS), its terminal can re-encrypt the cached content using the established (between them) TLS key and send it back to the client. Therefore, although there are two clients in this case, connected to (potentially) different terminals, requesting the same piece of content, there is a single content request, as well as, a single content transmission (the bulk of the data) traversing the satellite link. There are of course two separate (potentially asynchronous) data transmissions traversing short terrestrial links (using HTTPS). Nevertheless, and depending on the TLS interception approach, the satellite link may have to be used during the TLS handshake. Figure 5 shows the time required to load a simple text-based Web page using HTTPS. In this figure, the bars corresponding to the case where Encrypted Content-Encoding (ECE) is used (i.e., the application layer encryption approach), the page is retrieved from a cache, otherwise it is retrieved directly from the server.

Additional advantages that can be gained, include: (i) if terminals are connected using a terrestrial network, collaborative caching solutions can be deployed, (ii) popular content (such as OS updates) can be pushed to terminals, (iii) simultaneous content requests can be batched or even aggregated, (iv) solutions that achieve better performance by manipulating the transmitted content (such as network coding) can be easily deployed. Quantifying these advantages has been left as future work.

### C. Security considerations

The presented solutions are more secure compared to the certificate-based solutions used by CDNs. With the solutions presented in this paper TLS connections are intercepted only for a specific session (with Keyless TLS), or only for a specific period of time (with DANE with delegation semantics). Furthermore, with the presented solutions it is easier for a content provider to revoke the access rights of an intercepting device. Nevertheless, TLS splitting and the use of application layer encryption security solutions create some security and privacy concerns.

Intercepting devices are authorized to access content items stored under a specific domain, hence they can easily modify them. The integrity of the received items should be verified at

the application layer using tools such as the “Subresource Integrity” HTML tag. Furthermore, application designers should make sure that sensitive content, including user specific information, session identifiers, cookies, etc. cannot be accessed by third parties, even if the TLS session is intercepted. One should make sure that sensitive information and less sensitive content items are stored under different domains.

When it comes to DANE with delegation semantics, there is a time frame during which a “de-authorized” device can intercept a TLS session. This duration depends on the time-to-live (TTL) of the corresponding TLSA record. Application designers should consider this performance-security trade-off and adapt TTL accordingly. Note that there is also such a time frame with Keyless TLS, related to the TTL of a TLS session, but in this case “de-authorized” devices can only intercept already established sessions and not new ones.

Application layer encryption on the other hand creates privacy concerns. Since two HTTP messages, between two entities sharing the same key, are encrypting the same (secret) information, it is possible for a malicious user that observes the network traffic to discern if the content of these messages is the same or not. Furthermore, all network fields below the application layer are transmitted in plaintext. Application designers should take special precautions in order to properly anonymize transmitted messages.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Although end-to-end encryption enhances greatly end-user security and privacy, there are cases where access to the plaintext of the transmitted content by in-network devices is beneficial. For this reason, various solutions for enabling encrypted connection interception have been proposed. In this paper, and in the context of integrated satellite-terrestrial networks, we considered two of them, namely Keyless TLS and DANE with delegation semantics. The former solution is “pushed” by big CDN providers and requires no modification to TLS clients, whereas the latter solution is based on a promising standard and it can achieve TLS session establishment without any communication with the origin server. Both solutions can be deployed using readily available software and can co-exist with legacy TLS implementations. Furthermore, both solutions exhibit better security properties compared to the certificate-based solutions currently used by CDN providers.

The presented transport layer solutions can be combined with application layer encryption between a satellite terminal and the origin TLS server (i.e., the network path that includes the satellite network). The combination of the two approaches, creates interesting opportunities. In particular by sharing the application layer encryption key among the application server and the satellite terminals, it becomes possible to broadcast content to multiple terminals, enabling this way existing satellite-based content distribution solutions to operate with TLS clients and facilitating the deployment of novel optimization solutions, such as opportunistic caching.

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